



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Channel Islands National Park

The Nature Conservancy
Santa Cruz Island
California



Santa Cruz Island—Changing Patterns of Land Use

First Islanders



Santa Cruz Island supported sizable human populations over 10,000 years before present. The Chumash called Santa Cruz Island *Limuw*, meaning “in the sea.” The island Chumash were hunter-gatherers who collected food and resources from the ocean and the islands, and actively traded with other communities to maintain a highly developed way of life. Tomols, or plank canoes, were used for trade and travel between the islands and the mainland.

By the time Europeans arrived in the late 1700s, approximately 2,000 Chumash lived on the island, at 11 coastal village sites. By 1807, however, epidemic diseases had decimated the island population. Spanish missionaries relocated the remaining Chumash to mainland missions in 1822. Physical remnants of Chumash culture are still preserved on Santa Cruz Island in more than 3,000 archaeological sites.

The Channel Islands are significant to modern Chumash as their ancestral homeland. Between three and ten thousand Chumash live in California today, and many individuals can trace their ancestry to specific island villages. The Chumash retain a lively interest in the preservation of their heritage.

The Ranching Era

In 1839, Santa Cruz Island was sold by the Mexican government into private ownership. For the next 150 years the land was used primarily for ranching, and large herds of grazing cattle and sheep were introduced by multiple owners.

The past 150 years have seen an enormous change in the island vegetation due to widespread over-grazing. The most severe impacts to the islands were due to introduced animals, especially cattle, feral sheep and feral pigs, and their role in the spread of aggressive non-native plants.

Public and Private Conservation Organizations

In 1978, The Nature Conservancy acquired 90 percent of Santa Cruz Island. In 1980, Congress designated Anacapa, San Miguel, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Santa Rosa Islands and 125,000 acres of submerged lands as Channel Islands National Park. In 1997 the National Park Service acquired the remaining private lands on east Santa Cruz Island, and in 2000 The Nature Conservancy conveyed an additional 8,500 acres to the National Park Service. Today, The Nature Conservancy owns 76 percent of Santa Cruz Island and the National Park Service owns 24 percent.

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

The National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy have a cooperative agreement to co-manage Santa Cruz Island as one ecological unit. The two organizations share similar missions for conservation and protection of natural resources, and are working together to restore island resources.